

REMARKS**A. Status of the Claims and Explanation of the Amendments**

Claims 1-16 are pending. Claims 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, and 14 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) for allegedly being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 4,977,457 to Tamekuni et al (“Tamekuni”). Additionally, the Examiner has objected to claims 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, and 16 for being dependent on a base claim, but indicated that these claims would be allowable if rewritten in independent format including all of the elements of the base claim and any intervening claims.

Applicants have amended claims 3, 7, 11, and 15 to further clarify the invention. Support for these amendments is found throughout the specification (e.g., see paragraph 12 and paragraphs 32-72). Applicants believe that no new matter has been added. Applicants further note that all other claims (i.e., 1, 2, 4-6, 8-10, 12-14, and 16) have been cancelled without prejudice.

Applicants respectfully assert that claims 3, 7, 11 and 15 are now in condition for allowance, along with all of their corresponding dependent claims. Reconsideration and withdrawal of the objections to these claims are respectfully requested.

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claims and allowance of this application.

AUTHORIZATION

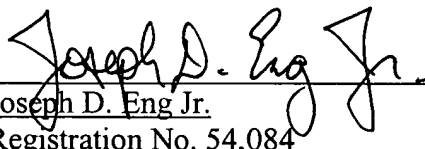
The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required for consideration of this Amendment to Deposit Account No. 13-4500, Order No. 1232-5152. A DUPLICATE OF THIS DOCUMENT IS ATTACHED.

In the event that an extension of time is required, or which may be required in addition to that requested in a petition for an extension of time, the Commissioner is requested to grant a petition for that extension of time which is required to make this response timely and is hereby authorized to charge any fee for such an extension of time or credit any overpayment for an extension of time to Deposit Account No. 13-4500, Order No. 1232-5152. A DUPLICATE OF THIS DOCUMENT IS ATTACHED.

Respectfully submitted,
MORGAN & FINNEGAN, L.L.P.

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By:



Joseph D. Eng Jr.
Registration No. 54,084
(212) 415-8700 Telephone
(212) 415-8701 Facsimile

Correspondence Address:

MORGAN & FINNEGAN, L.L.P.
3 World Financial Center
New York, NY 10281-2101